



Fateful Flapjacks

By WILLARD E. HAWKINS

*Flapjacks and biscuits is grub hard to beat,
They're fillin' and hearty beside.
But when them concoctions is mixed indiscreet,
They shore kicks up a rumpus inside.*

OUR fu'st meetin' with Hennery Hardscrabble comes about while me and my pardner, Windy Boggs, is sterilizin' our tonsils down at the Star and Buckle S'loon at Bungtown. This bozo comes breezin' into said emporium, with a exstatic look in his eyes, and prances up to the bar.

"Step up, boys," he squeaks, sprinklin' a handful of change on the mahog'ny. "Step up an' jine me in celebratin' the exhoobrance of my sperrits."

Arter participatin' hearty in said libation, Windy inquires respectful relative to the occasion fer the joy and generosity this hombre is manifestin'.

"It's all on account of my havin' annexed the heights of domestic bliss and hawg-tied in bonds of materimony one of the noblest wimmin of the

female speeches," Hennery informs us elated. "I'm jest a-effervessin' and bilin' over inside o' me with felicitude an' joy."

"Yuh mean yuh've went and got married?" I comes back.

"The same," says Hennery. "And I'm all bogged down with unadulterated happiness. Have another drink."

STUDYIN' Hennery appraisin', me and Windy wonders how he tricked any dame into the bonds of materimony. He's shriveled up and cross-eyed, and bald-headed, and afflicted with a scraggly paintbrush of a moustache, gen'rally drippin' with whatever nourishment he happens to have been absorbin' recent. All the same, there ain't no denyin' that he's got the outward

specifications of a happy and hilarious bridegroom.

"Is them flapjacks and biscuits settin' as good as ever?" the barkeep asks solicitous.

Hardscrabble fixes him with a cross-eyed look.

"Hombre," he says impressive, "ef this yere nectar of the gods I've heard tell on was to start dribblin' down outa the sky, I wouldn't take a slop pail of it in trade fer one of them sody biscuits Sal turns out fer me.

"And speakin' of flapjacks! Man! I et sixteen of 'em this mornin' fer breakfast, and it seemed like each one tasted better'n the last. Didn't have to put up no holler for 'em neither. The old woman she shoved 'em at me blame near faster 'n I could stuff 'em down. When I think what I been missin' all these years of batchin' it alone—"

His voice trails off sudden, and he stands thar swayin' wobbly on his feet. They's a greenish tinge begins to creep around his gills. The joy fades from his face like it had been swabbed off with a mop.

Me and Windy catches him jest as he starts to fall, and eases him into a chair. The barkeep hustles out and fans his face with the bar towel.

"I reckon I—better git outside—in the fresh air," Hardscrabble groans, holdin' his stomach with both hands. "Lou—that thar licker of yoren is gettin' wuss ever' day."

The barkeep don't take no offense at this, but helps the old geezer onto his feet sympathetic. He comes back from seein' Hennery out of the door, shakin' his head regretful.

"It's a measly shame to see a hombre's wedded enjoyments jimmed up by dispepsy of the stomach," Windy observes reflective.

"Pore old Hennery," the barkeep responds gloomy. "I was afeared of this from the start."

That's all we c'n get him to say on the subjec', and it ain't till some weeks later, while we're in town on a errand for Old-man Barkhausen of the B-X ranch whar we works, that we runs onto Hennery agin, settin' on the steps of the gen'ral store.

The change what's come over the old critter is shore some startlin' to behold. 'Stead of dilatin' on his happiness and general exhoobrance of sperrit, he's hunched over disconsolate, one arm crooked around a post while t'other one is grippin' his stomach like he was afeared it was gonna flop out and git away.

"Howdy," we observes, stumblin' over his feet.

"Howdy," he comes back sepulchural.

Windy stops to chin with the rooster while I

meanders inside the store.

Comin' out, I'm jest in time to hear Hennery make the follerin' inquiry:

"Puttin' it to yuh straight," he says, "ef yuh was in a place whar life was jest a burden an' a affliction, and they wa'n't no way outer the mess, what 'ld be yore advice for terminatin' the same?"

"Seems to me," says Windy, tippin' me a wink, "I'd take a squint down the muzzle of a six-gun and ferget absentminded not to jerk the trigger."

"Yeah," goes on Hennery gloomy. "But ef yuh didn't have the nerve to commit said act of self-destrucshun, what then?"

"That bein' the case," my pardner tells him solemn, "I'd hire some other waddy to take me out an' shoot me through the gizzard."

HENNERY don't seem to be takin' no comfort from this line of advice, so we travels on.

Durin' the ride home, Windy posts me on what him and Hennery had been chinnin' about while I was inside. Seems that by this time Hennery's ideals of wedded bliss was plumb revised. Bein' hardened to a diet of sow-belly and beans, he'd mistook them biscuits and flapjacks of Sally's at first fer real grub. Now that the preliminary exhoobrance had faded outer the honeymoon, he was beginnin' to ree'lize that Sal's prev'ous six husbands had plenty of reason for dyin' off untimely.

"The most compliment'ry thing that bozo had got to say for them articles of pizen she dishes up to him," Windy tells me, "is that they ain't nothin' but soggy messes of contaminated ingred'ents. Some of the designations what he applied to 'em I wouldn't mention, account of not wantin' to turn yore stomach."

"Why don't he quit eatin' 'em?" I asks pointed.

"She won't stand fer it," Windy retorts. "That woman weighs two hundred pound on the hoof, and she picks her husbands little and scrawny so's they can't get up on their ear and rebel at absorbin' what she slaps on the table before 'em. There ain't nothin' she takes more delight in than mixin' up them deadly concoctions of her'n, and Hennery can't git outa the house till he's et his full quota of sixteen flapjacks each mornin'."

HENNERY HARDSCRABBLE and his troubles, bein' out of sight, is out of mind, so fur as me and Windy is concerned, till one evenin'

Old-man Barkhausen calls us outa the bunkhouse.

"Boys," he starts off severe, "why the Sam Hill can't the two on yuh be trusted to conduc' yoreselfs proper when I turns yuh loose to run into town?"

Both on us tries to look innercent, not knowin' perzactly what he was referrin' to.

"Ef yo're alludin' to the time I got a mite hilar'ous and shot up the mirror over the Star and Buckle bar," Windy says injured-like, "why, I c'n explain that thar trivial incident. Yuh see—"

"I ain't alludin' to no sech event," Barkhausen retorts grim.

"Then ef Lem Saunders has been complainin' about us bustin' inter his undertakin' parlors an' sleepin' in them coffins," I commences defensive, "I'm ready to admit—"

"That act of desecration is plumb news to me," admits Barkhausen. He waits a minute, mebbe thinkin' we'll unburden ourselves of some more incriminatin' statements, but we shuts up like a coupla clams. There ain't no use huntin' trouble, seein' as it looks like we're in fer plenty 'thout turnin' a hand.

"I ain't up on none of the details," the old man informs us, "but yuh've shore got pore old Hennery Hardscrabble on the prod. Sheriff Henderson was tellin' me he figgers the old geezer's mentality is givin' way under the strain. That hombre is plumb harmless and unoffensive, and I ain't gonna have none of my waddies makin' life a burden fer his declinin' years."

Both on us looks blank.

"Hennery Hardscrabble?" I busts out, astonished.

"We don't hardly know that hombre from Noah's off-ox," Windy comes back emphatic.

Barkhausen shakes his head.

"All the same, Hennery claims yuh got him in one hell of a jam, and there won't nothin' do but I've got to send yuh over to his place and help him out of it."

"That critter is plumb loco," Windy states conclusive.

"Them flapjacks has pizened his brain," I speaks up, beginnin' to see the light.

"Hennery ain't troubled with no more flapjacks," Barkhausen informs us dry. "That old woman of his'n eloped last week with a Mex'can shepherder. Boys, I ain't settin' no limit on yore innercent amusements, but I reckon yuh better ride over and undo this yere mischief. Whatever it is,

yuh got Hennery on the edge of nervous prostration."

Consider'ble mystified, me and Windy wrangles ourselfs a pair of mounts. It seems like the only piece of orn'riness we didn't have on our consciences was bein' laid at our door.

Hennery owns a rundown place located at the entrance of Box Canyon, about a hour's ride from the B-X. It's plumb dark when we rides up to the same and I ain't so shore we'll find the maverick at home.

ALL doubts is settled, humsoever, when a warnin' shot cracks from one of the winders and a bullet sings past my ear.

Both of our nags takes a notion to start plugin' and rearin'. By the time we gets 'em quieted down, we c'n hear Hennery's voice informin' us what he'll do ef we comes any closer.

"Git goin'!" he bellers threatenin'. "Hit the dust an' hit it like yuh meant distance. I got yuh covered, and when I shoots I shoots to kill."

Bein' plumb flabbergasted, I reckon we didn't take the hint quite rapid enough to suit that rapscaillon. Two more slugs of lead sings past us afore we swings a-round and perambulates out of range.

"That's a hell of a reception," Windy observates disgusted. "Arter us ridin' over peaceful and benevolent to help the old geezer outter his troubles."

"Hennery most likely didn't reco'nize who we was," I reminds him pacifyin'. "He was jest a-shootin' at strangers on gen'ral princ'pals. It's like Old-man Barkhausen told us; he's plumb upsot and vexed over suthin'. I reckon it's our jooty to figger out a way of ca'min' him down."

"I'd like to ca'm him down with a wagon tongue," Windy retorts peevish. "Mebbe ef we was to creep up on his shack from behind—"

We studies the lay of the land, and fin'ly decides that by workin' our way over the ridge, we'll be able to get closet enough on our nags to creep up the rest of the way afoot.

Half an hour later, we squirmed through the bob-wire fence on the hill overlookin' his place, and started slippin' up cautious on the rear of Hennery's domicile.

"There ain't only one way of gettin' the critter into a peaceful and reas'nable state of mind," Windy opines. "The fu'st one of us what gets closet

enough better tap him over the head with the cold end of a six-gun. Arter that—pervidin' he ain't too long comin' out of it—we'll inquire into what's troublin' his conscience."

The plan seems to be workin' out as per schedule; I've crep' up closet to the back of the shack and Windy is sneakin' up to'rd the door, when that clumsy son-of-a-dehorned-heifer falls over a sawbuck.

He couldn't of made no more noise ef he'd been carryin' a armlod of cowbells. The wu'st of it is, when he starts to get up an' make a run fer it, his foot is all tangled up in the danged contraption.

"Lay still!" I snarls at him. "Moo like a cow!"

But he ain't got presence of mind enough fer that. Besides, the back door was opened cautious. Squeezed up agin' the side of the boards, I c'n see the business end of a Winchester pokin' out slow.

"Git to hell outa here!" Hennery yells vicious. "I'll fill yuh full o' lead ef yuh takes another step."

Both of us holds our breath and sets tight.

"Yuh ain't foolin' me none!" Hennery informs us. "I c'n see yuh clear as if 'twas daylight."

The same bein' a plumb lie on its face, calcalated to bluff whoever was out thar into thinkin' he was a dangerous hombre to draw agin'.



WHEN there ain't no answer forthcomin', the barrel of that Winchester projects fu'ther, follered by Hennery's bald cran'yum—his

paintbrush moustache wavin' in the breeze.

Windy, layin' halfway over the saw-buck, musta got nervous, or else the shebang gave 'way under his weight. They was a sudden crack and a splinterin' sound.

Afore Hardscrabble got the Winchester to his shoulder, I reached out with my old six-gun and tapped him gentle on the bean. He toppled forru'd without even a groan.

Windy kicked hisself loose from the boards and helped me drag the old duffer inside. By the time we feels around and gets a lamp lighted, he's commencin' to come to.

"D'yuh figger we'd better tie him up?" I inquires meditative.

"Tain't necess'ry," Windy concludes. "Jest so we don't let him get his hands on none of that arsenal." He points to the floor beside the front winder, whar they's a collection of rifles, six-guns, and ammunition extensive enough to arm a sheriff's posse.

"Whoever that bozo was layin' fer, he wa'n't takin' no chances," I comments, wonderin'.

Hennery sets up on the cot whar we'd laid him, and starts rubbin' his head. He gives a start at reco'nizin' us, but 'stead of makin' a dive fer his guns, he seems plumb relieved and glad to see us.

"Boys, yuh shore come jest in time to rescue me," he says. "They's been a reg'lar army of 'em surroundin' my place tonight."

"Army of which?" I inquires cur'ous.

"Hombres what's out gunnin' fer me," the old geezer elucidates. "They was comin' in bunches. I hadn't no more'n drove off a pair of 'em at the front than some o' the rest steals up on my place from behind. One of 'em creased my scalp with a bullet."

Windy an' me figgered it was jest as well to let it go at that.

"Howcome all the gunplay?" I makes inquiry. "Enemies of yoren?"

Hennery hangs his head kinder foolish.

"I wouldn't perzactly call 'em that," he admits reluctant. "Fact is, if they'd come around last week I'd of figgered they was doin' me a favor."

"Doin' a favor by fillin' yore carcass full o' lead?"

He don't seem to have no comeback fer this. Windy and me exchanges looks signif'cant. There wa'n't no doubt about the hombre bein' loco, jest like we'd suspected.

“Whatinell did yuh want to go an’ tell our boss we got yuh in the jam fer?” Windy busts out indignant.

This seems to sorter rile Hennery up.

“By crackey!” he flares, “ef it weren’t yore doin’ what got me inter this mess, ‘twa’n’t nobody’s. I don’t figger on comin’ outer it alive, but the least yuh c’n do to squar yoreselfs is to he’p me stave ‘em off as long as they’s a chancet.”

THERE didn’t seem only one thing to do an’ that was to humor him in his mental affliction. I tells him not to worry. Me and Windy ‘ll pervent these bad hombres from doin’ the favor of exterminatin’ him.

Hennery seems to take some comfort outa this statement.

“Yuh’ll have to keep watch fer ‘em day and night,” he warns, peerin’ around furtive. “I ain’t hardly dast close my eyes sence I knowed they was gunnin’ fer me.”

“Who is these malicious friends of yoren?” Windy inquires insinuatn’.

Hennery shakes his head despondent. “I ain’t got no idear,” he admits.

The critter is settin’ hunched over on his cot, while me and Windy, holdin’ down two of his wired-up chairs, leans back agin’ the wall and stares at him flabbergasted. Realizin’ that he’s jest a pore, deluded maverick, tormented by mental aberrations, we can’t he’p feelin’ sorry fer him.

“Hennery,” I speaks up sympathetic, “mebbe it’d relieve yore mind ef yuh was to tell the hull story. Start from the beginnin’.”

“The beginnin’,” he retorts pronto, “was the desp’rate state of despondency stirred up inside of me by the cookin’ of my wife, Sal.”

“Her as made sody biscuits superior to the nectar of the gods?” I inquires.

Hennery gives a sickly grin and grabs reminiscent at his stomach.

“The same,” he admits. “I was shore sufferin’ unspeakable from them abominations, on top of the greasy slabs of dough she designates mendacious by the entitlement of flapjacks, when yuh started that idear of endin’ it all a-buzzin’ around in my mental cavity. Mebbe yuh was aimin’ to be funny, but yuh caught me in a state of mind whar I was takin’ things mighty ser’ous. Anyhow, that’s how I come to tack ‘em up.”

“Tack what up?” I inquires puzzled. “The

flapjacks?”

“Gimme time an’ I’ll tell yuh,” he snaps testy. “Bein’ plumb desp’rate, and not havin’ the guts to p’int a gun at my own gizzard, I figgered it out that a nice, easy way of endin’ it all was to take yore advice.”

“Yuh mean yuh went out an’ hired a waddie to pump yuh full o’ lead?”

“Wal, I didn’t feel like I knowed nobody well enough to ask ‘em a favor like that,” he responds apologetic. “Anyhow, the way I looked at it, this demise I was contemplatin’ would come a hull lot pleasanter ef it took me sorter unexpected. So I hit on the scheme of tackin’ up some notices what oughter turn the trick. Seems like I got one of ‘em what was left over.”

HE FISHES around in his jeans and comes out with a dirty piece of paper. We spreads it out and reads as follows:

NOTIS

\$156 bucks Reeward for the killin of
HENNERY HARDCRABBLE
Bring him in dead and the cash is yor’n
No bounty paid on said critter alive

“It’s plumb unbelievable!” I remarks, shakin’ my head.

“Not ef yuh had to eat sixteen of Sal’s flapjacks ever’ mornin’, it ain’t,” Hennery retorts emphatic.

“Who’s gonna pay this reeward?”

“I had that part fixed all right,” Hennery says offhand. “I drewed out all the coin I’d been savin’ up at the bank and turned it over to Sheriff Henderson, tellin’ him to pass it over to any waddie what shows up draggin’ my corpse. Henderson acts kinder reluctant, but he fin’lly gives in.”

I nudges Windy in the ribs. ‘Twa’n’t no wonder the sheriff figgered Hennery was gettin’ wobbly in his upper story.

Hennery goes on to tell how he tacked up them notices onto fence posts, spendin’ most of the artemoon ridin’ around gettin’ ‘em in conspicuous places. He figgered that if a rannie what was new to the country come driftin’ along, he’d spot one of them notices and start out to claim the reward.

“Yuh shore went about it systematic,” Windy admits.

“Yeah,” observes Hennery bitter. “And then this Mex’can shepherder has to go an’ interfere with

my plans. I hadn't no more'n got back home from tackin' up them signs than I finds him and Sal has up an' eloped."

"That ain't no calamity," I pertests. "Seems to me yuh owes him a debt of gratichude."

"Whadda yuh mean, gratichude? Can't yuh see the fix it leaves me in?"

He's got us stumped, an' we admits it.

Hennery elucidates patient. "Jest when I'd got all reconciled to the idear that life wa'n't wu'th livin', here this jasper comes along an' wipes out my troubles complete. My mental workin's does a absolute flop. Birds is twitterin' in the bushes; the sun starts to shinin' out bright an' hopeful. Peace and contentment settles over my troubled sperrit. And that meddlin' rapsCALLION was to blame fer the hull of it, carsarn his hide!"

We shakes our heads. "Seems like yuh'd appreciate that thar euphoneous condition of mind," I tells him.

"Not when I've got this demise of mine all fixed up an' prepared fer," Hennery comes back snappish. "It jest upsets all my plans."

"But yuh could go out an' pull down them notices."

"No sech thing," he groans. "Boys, I'm jest natcher'ly in the wu'st jam a waddie ever tangled hissself up with. I hadn't no more'n wrangled me a fresh nag and hightailed it back over the ground whar I'd tacked them pieces of paper, than I discivered ever' dod-rotted one of 'em was gone."



THAT shore puts a diff'rent face on things. I'm beginnin' to ree'lize that Hennery ain't so fur out of his reckonin' as we'd considered him at the

start. 'Twa'n't no wonder the deluded critter had barricaded hissself up with all that arsenal and started pepperin' vis'ters with bullets the minute they shoved in sight.

"Tell, yuh what," Windy decides. "Scoot and me'll hole up here fer the night. Tomorry we'll ride in town, actin' as a bodyguard fer yuh, and put the facts afore Sheriff Henderson, claimin' the protection of the lawr."

This sorter ca'ms Hennery's nerves fer the time bein'. Next mornin' we heads into town, findin' when we arrives that Henderson is out on the trail of a hoss thief. We locks Hennery up in the back room of the s'loon fer safety till the sheriff shows up.

'Tain't till late in the arternoon that Henderson and his deputy rides into town with a pris'ner. Windy an' me rounds up Hennery and hustles him over to the sheriff's office in the front part of the jail.

Henderson ain't in no amiable state of mind. He acts wore out an' sore on the world. His nerves is shore frazzled. Spottin' Hennery, he reaches in his desk and fishes out a env'lope.

"Here's that hundred an' fifty-six bucks of yore'n," he says severe. "Take it and git to hell out. I got troubles enough, 'thout keepin' track of other people's money."

Hennery pockets the env'lope meek. "Sheriff—" he begins.

"Can't talk to yuh now," Henderson snaps. "I got business to look arter."

Seein' as this squelches Hennery, Windy speaks up.

"Yeah," he says ingratiatin'. "We seed as how yuh got yore man. Yuh shore are a deemon fer carryin' out yore duties of office. Now Hennery here—"

"Whadda yuh mean, got my man!" the sheriff snorts, pullin' his moustaches and scowlin'. "Don't start gittin' funny with the lawr!"

"We seed yuh bringin' in a pris'ner," Windy retorts defensive.

"That ain't nothin' but some triflin' Mex'can," Henderson tells us disgusted. "The galoot comes bustin' out of a shack and wants to give hissself up. Bring him out, Lafe," he orders, turnin' on his deputy. "I reckon I may as well find out what the critter is wanted fer."

While Lafe Withers is carryin' out instructions, I tries to get in a word relative to what's on our

mind, but the sheriff ain't int'rested.

"Hennery's a dodderin' old fool," he remarks unsympathetic. "There ain't nobody gunnin' fer him, 'cept in his imagination."

BY THIS time Lafe comes back, bringin' his pris'ner. Soon as that Mex'can catches sight of Hardscrabble, he falls on his knees and commences jabberin' at the top of his lungs.

Hennery gives a start. "That's the miscr'ant what run off with my wife!" he yaps excited.

"I no run away!" the Mex'can blubbers. "I geeve me up myself. Please, you no send me back to eat zose beeskit!" He rambles on some more, spillin' a mouthful of his furrin lingo.

"Shet up!" Henderson bellers at him. He swings on his deputy. "What's he tryin' to say?"

Lafe Withers, account of bein' able to talk Mex'can jabber most as fluent as he does range lingo, holds a confab with the pris'ner. He turns around grinnin'.

"This bozo says he's plumb repentant fer his sins. He says he's been punished plenty, but he knows all about the reeward Senor Hardscrabble posted, account of his stealin' the hombre's wife, and he's ready to take all that's comin' to him."

"What reward?" Henderson barks. "I ain't heard nothin' of no reward."

Lafe turns and holds some more parley with the Mex'can. That bozo fishes inside his shirt and brings out a roll of wadded-up papers.

"He says," Lafe reports, "as how he rode around behind Senor Hardscrabble and tore down them notices as fast as Hennery tacked 'em up. He couldn't read none of 'em, but havin' a guilty conscience he knowed the senor was offerin' a bounty fer bringin' him in dead or alive."

Hennery is starin' with his mouth open at that bunch of papers. All of a suddent he gives a whoop an' jumps up in the air, clappin' his heels together twicet afore he comes down.

Henderson stares at him fierce.

"Kick that fool Mex'can out," he yaps. "We ain't got no charges agin' him."

Lafe takes the galoot by the scruff of the neck and trots him outside. He ain't no more'n stepped back in, wipin' his hands on his jeans, than they's a

commotion and yellin' out in front.

The Mex'can comes bustin' back in, throwin' hisself on his knees in front of the sheriff.

"Please!" he begs, his eyes blame near poppin' outer his face. "Please, Senor Sheriff, put me back in ze jail. I no care you hang me. I do anysing you say. Only please no send me back to eat zose terrible flapjacks—"

Cussin' a streak, Henderson shoves him outa his way and steps over to the door to see what all the yellin' is about.

HENNERY perks up his ears and listens, a sickly pallor spreadin' over his face. Account of the sheriff blockin' the door, me and Windy can't figger what it's all about. But we hears a excited woman's voice yellin' above the hootin' of the mob.

Henderson turns and beckons to'rd us.

"Hennery," he says, the orn'ry look on his face givin' place to a benev'lent grin, "looks like good news fer yuh. That wife of yore'n has come back. She's willin' to fergive yuh and let bygones be bygones. She says that wu'thless galoot she run off with didn't appreciate her cookin'. She's rarin' to take yuh back an' cook yore vittles fer the rest of yore natchral life."

Pore old Hennery. He can't do nothin' but stand thar stunned. Somehow, he don't seem to be enterin' none into the joys of the reunion.

All of a suddent, he flops down on his knees beside the Mex'can.

"Please, Sheriff," he blubbers, holdin' out his arms pleadin', "put me in jail too!"

There ain't nothin' more to tell. The last time I run acrosst Hennery, he was ridin' mournful along the south boundary of the Bar Z ranch, tackin' up pieces of paper on the fence posts. Them notices of his is spread all over the county, but I ain't never larned of a waddie takin' one of 'em ser'ous.

Pore old Hennery. As the poet says:

Flapjacks and biscuits is grub hard to beat,

They're fillin' and hearty beside.

But when them concoctions is mixed indiscreet,

They shore kicks up a rumpus inside.